



**2021 Coronavirus
Follow Up Needs Assessment
Southeast Iowa
June 2021**

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Introduction

This update to the Community Action of Southeast Iowa Community Assessment and the 2020 Coronavirus Needs Assessment was completed in June 2021 in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

By March 17, 2020, all 50 US States had confirmed cases of coronavirus. By mid-March 2020, with the virus clearly past the stage of effective isolation and contact tracing, local, state and federal public health officials recommend extreme measures to minimize a public health catastrophe: mass quarantine, physical distancing, and a virtual lockdown of all public gatherings and economic activity.

Because of the urgent, widespread, and long lasting needs affecting all sectors of the community, this Community Assessment update is intended to provide some information to describe the scope of this crisis on our community and to support the many different responses to address evolving needs.

This assessment provides a look at the needs in southeast Iowa; Des Moines, Lee, Henry, and Louisa Counties, a little over one year since the onset of the pandemic. Our agency completes a community assessment every three years in accordance with the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) requirements, this was completed in July 2019. With the unprecedented effects of the pandemic we completed an initial survey and assessment in May 2020; the 2020 Coronavirus Needs Assessment. This 2021 Coronavirus Follow Up Needs Assessment in June 2021 is meant to assess and inform programs, services, and strategies moving forward, just over one year past the onset of the pandemic and resulting affects. This is a part of our commitment to follow the Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) framework and serve our community well.

Our agency's 2019 Community Needs Assessment listed the following as top identified client needs:

1. Employment - Clients need employment. Clients need living wage employment.
2. Housing - Clients need safe and affordable housing.
3. Transportation - Clients need reliable, affordable and available transportation.
4. Food - Clients need food. Clients need resources for obtaining affordable and healthy foods.
5. Budgeting - Clients need assistance managing their finances. Clients need to resolve debt.¹

Our agency's 2020 COVID-19 Public Needs Survey notes the top needs for those of low income (less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, FPL) during the Coronavirus crisis as:

1. Coping with high stress levels in a healthy way
2. Mental health
3. Educational concern for my children while they are not in school
4. Helping my children or loved one cope with high stress levels in a healthy way
5. Ability to pay utilities
6. Employment
7. Debt
8. Ability to pay rent/mortgage
9. Getting food

¹ Community Action of Southeast Iowa 2019 Community Needs Assessment. <http://caofseia.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2019-Community-Needs-Assessment-Caofseia-Final.pdf>

10. Getting hygiene or personal care items ²

Our 2021 Coronavirus Follow Up Needs Assessment revealed top needs for those of low income (less than 200% FPL) one year after the onset of Coronavirus are:

1. Coping with high stress levels in a healthy way
2. Mental health
3. Ability to pay utilities
4. Debt
5. Helping my children or loved one cope with high stress levels in a healthy way
6. Ability to pay rent/mortgage
7. Budgeting
8. Employment
9. Getting food

Area Statistics

Statistics listed are for southeast Iowa; Des Moines, Henry, Lee, and Louisa Counties unless otherwise noted. Percentage in poverty is at 100% FPL unless otherwise noted.

Poverty level of all persons	13.08%
200% FPL ³	32.11%
200% FPL in Iowa	28.26%
200% FPL in the USA	30.86%
Unemployment rate April 2019 Iowa	2.9%
Unemployment rate April 2020 Iowa	12.7%
Unemployment rate April 2021 Iowa ⁴	3.8%
White population ⁵	91.59%
White population in poverty	11.97%
Black population	3.6%
Black population in poverty	53.96%
Mixed Race population	2.4%
Mixed Race in poverty	33.42%
Agency self-identified clients with a minority ethnicity FY 2020 ⁶	21.92%
Iowans with a disability ⁷	11.8%
Agency client households receiving disability	41.8%
Females in poverty	15.87%
Males in poverty	11.75%
Children eligible for free and reduced lunch (185% FPL) ⁸	51.5%

² Community Action of Southeast Iowa 2020 COVID-19 Public Needs Survey. <http://caofseia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020-05-11-Survey-Summary.pdf>

³ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19

⁴ Iowa Workforce Development Status May 2021 Report.

https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/sites/search.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/files/documents/2018/StatusIowaWorkforce04_2021.pdf

⁵ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-2019

⁶ Community Action of Southeast Iowa Annual Report Fiscal Year 2020.

⁷ State Data Center of Iowa. Iowans with Disabilities: 2020.

⁸ National Center for Education Statistics, NCES - Common Core of Data. 2018-19

Minorities, those of low-income, and those with pre-existing conditions (often also disabled individuals) are at a greater risk of getting Coronavirus, more serious affects, economic disruption, and long term difficulties. These populations are ones we are already serving with our agency programs and services. Enhanced services, continued connections, and community collaboration are paramount as we battle various effects of Coronavirus and the economic related needs. As poverty increases, so does the proportion of requests seeking help with non-COVID-19 needs⁹.

Survey Data

1. 272 total respondents
2. 101 low income respondents (below 200% FPL according to 2020 poverty guidelines)
3. 171 respondents above 200% FPL
4. All respondents by county:

Des Moines	68.75%
Lee	25.74%
Henry	3.31%
Louisa	0.74%
Other	1.1%

This survey was conducted solely online through SurveyMonkey. It was emailed to service providers, shared on Facebook several times by our and other agencies, promoted on our website, included in our Community Action Month of May 2021 promotions, emailed to staff, and encouraged to clients. The survey was open to the public from April 26, 2021 through June 2, 2021. More detailed response data is available by contacting Community Action's central office: 319-753-0193 or community.action@caofseia.org If you have questions regarding this assessment or summary please contact us.

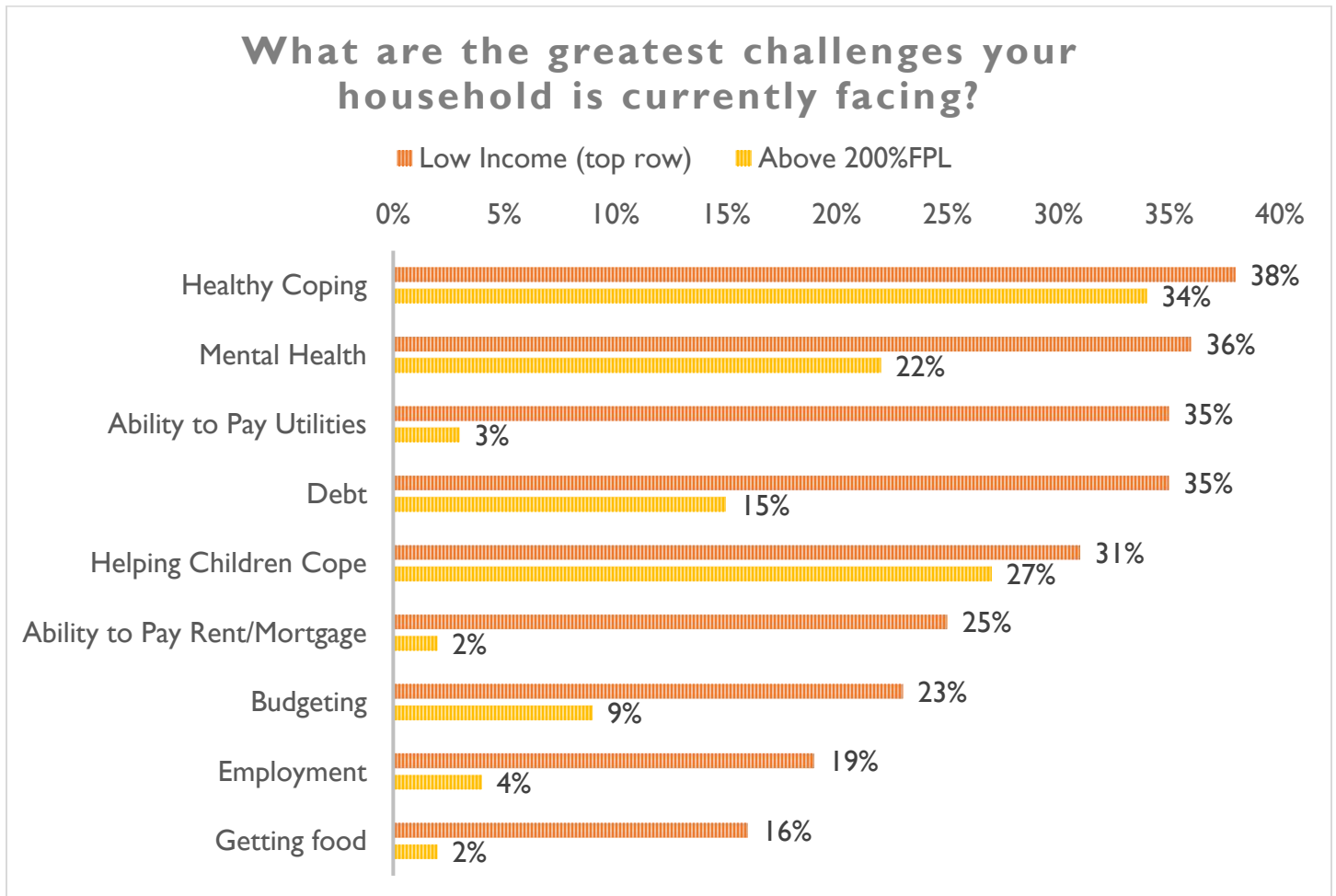
Top Identified Needs For Those of Low Income

- Coping with high stress levels in a healthy way/mental health/helping others cope
- Housing/Utilities
- Debt/Budgeting
- Employment
- Getting food

There are always needs in our communities. With Coronavirus, needs have exploded. This is evident in the number of inquiries for assistance to 2-1-1, the information referral helpline, in southeast Iowa. From March 2019 to 2020, pre-COVID, there were 291 requests for assistance. From March 2020 to March 2021 there were 1,685 requests: 999 requests were related to healthcare and COVID-19 information. When those are taken out of the equation, requests for assistance for housing, food, utilities, employment, and others increased from 274 to 686, a 150% increase in requests for assistance.

⁹ Economic needs trump COVID needs in high poverty ZIP codes. <https://hcrl.wustl.edu/economic-needs-trump-covid-needs-in-high-poverty-zip-codes/>

The below chart is in order of greatest need as identified by those of low income. It also reports the percentage of those above 200% FPL who listed that category as a great need.



Mental Health

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) estimates 1 in 5 people live with a mental illness. Many surveys and reports being done about the Coronavirus report outcomes of worsened mental health. We see the top three of four needs in our 2020 Coronavirus Needs Assessment and the top three of five in our 2021 Coronavirus Follow Up Needs Assessment relate to mental health.

Iowa has implemented enhanced mental health assistance and awareness through COVID Recovery Iowa. They have offered free counseling, virtual programming, referrals, and assistance to any Iowan in need. The local chapter of NAMI has received national recognition and continued with local programming.

Our agency understands the importance of mental health and its affects and reaches in people's lives. Our programs continue to make referrals, help reduce stigma, participate in trainings, provide staff training, share information, and collaborate with local service providers in the mental health arena.

Housing and Utilities

Housing continues to be a struggle for many in southeast Iowa. We see an increased need now, just over a year past the start of the pandemic, relating to housing and utility needs. For a time during the pandemic there was an eviction moratorium (temporary stop) and utility moratorium for some utilities. As time has gone on, utilities are now able to disconnect people for non-payment and landlords are finding ways around changed eviction moratoriums. This has likely contributed to the concern households have regarding these needs.

The US Census Bureau in May 2021 with their Weekly Household Pulse Survey: Phase 3.1 for April 28-May 10, 2021 shares that 5.8% of adults are not current on their rent or mortgage payment and have slight or no confidence in making their next payment on time. Of adults living in households not current on rent or mortgage, 33% report eviction or foreclosure in the next two months is somewhat or very likely.

In our 2021 Coronavirus Follow Up Needs Assessment 25% of low-income respondents (18% in 2020) report their ability to pay rent/mortgage is a great challenge and 35% (25% in 2020) report their ability to pay utilities is a great challenge. This is an increase of 7% and 10% respectively, since the onset of the pandemic. 2-I-I reports a 173% increase in requests of utility needs, and a 212% increase in housing and shelter needs over the past year in Iowa¹⁰.

Our agency has received additional funding for housing and utility programs during the pandemic. We have formed new partnerships, met with local landlords, and provided information and referrals relating to eviction moratoriums. We hired a housing specialist, participated in checking applications for the Iowa Finance Authority rental assistance program in 2020 and another for rent and utilities in summer 2021. We have started a new partnership with Amerigroup's CHAMP program flex fund, publicized, and promoted rental, utility, and broadband/internet programs in our area. For years we have done water assistance through our non-federal funds, we have continued through the pandemic, and are also working on a new water assistance program with additional funding and partners. Our agency will continue to prioritize assisting with housing costs through various housing programs and utility assistance.

Debt and Budgeting

In our 2019 Community Assessment, budgeting was listed as a top need. The Burlington Community School District spring 2021 Community Survey asked respondents if they had experienced financial insecurity, 74% said yes, 30.52% said budgeting was a reason for their financial insecurity and 34% had personal debt. Those of low income in the 2021 Coronavirus Follow Up Needs Assessment revealed 35% (23% in 2020) said debt was a great challenge for their household, and 23% (13% in 2020) said budgeting was a great challenge. Over the past year debt and budgeting concerns have increased by 12% and 10% respectively.

Debt and budgeting are broad categories and people often have various reasons for why this is difficult or has occurred in their homes. Our family development specialists are trained in budget counseling, have access to solid financial training through the Iowa Insurance Division, and make budgeting education a part of some agency programs such as the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) housing program. We plan to continue offering one on one basic budget counseling to those in need. Many of our assistance programs are geared toward preventing further debt as we help with emergency needs. This prevention steers people away from predatory payday loans, rent-a-centers, and unwise borrowing practices.

¹⁰ 2-I-I Counts. Increase calculated from March 1, 2019-March 1, 2020 compared to March 1, 2020 to March 1, 2021 in Des Moines, Lee, Henry, and Louisa Counties. <https://ia.211counts.org/>

Employment

Employment continues to be a top need for people in southeast Iowa. It was a top need prior to coronavirus, has been throughout the pandemic, and continues to be now over a year later even though unemployment rates have returned to near normal in Iowa; from 12.7% to 3.8%. 19% of the low-income in our 2021 Coronavirus Follow Up Needs Assessment report employment as one of their household's great needs. This has reduced by 5% when compared to low-income individual's responses in our 2020 Coronavirus Needs Assessment. 40% of 2021 respondents note their income is lower than it was before COVID. This is compared to only 9% of those above 200% FPL who say the same.

Our agency has continued to assist clients relating to employment with employment counseling, referrals to Iowa Workforce, funding available relating to training, schooling, internships, apprenticeships, and upscaling skills available through grants, Goodwill of the Heartland, and Southeastern Community College.

Food

Food has been listed as a top need in our area for several years. This has been evident in our 2016 Client Needs Assessment, the 2019 Client Satisfaction Survey, 2020 Client Needs Assessment, and other reports. This need has remained about the same for our respondents during our 2020 and 2021 assessment at 16.92% and 16% respectively. Across Iowa, 2-I-I notes a 372% increase in food need requests over the past year¹¹. One study found there is a strong bidirectional causal relationship between food insecurity and depression in rural low-income families¹². Mental health, which we know and this survey reports as a top need, is connected to food insecurity and physical health. Providing access to food for those of low income is important.

Food was and is a top need in southeast Iowa as this, other, and previous needs assessments have demonstrated. Our agency has continued to operate food pantries and made modifications for no contact deliveries and pickups. We have shared information and made referrals regarding enhanced Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, the Farmers to Families program through local churches, enhanced WIC benefits, senior home meal delivery through Milestones Area Agency on Aging, received grant funding for supplementing food giveaways through donations, the Iowa Food Bank, FEMA, and others.

Community Resource Awareness

The broad impacts of COVID-19 on this community have created an even more urgent need for coordination and collaboration of resources among the public sector, the public health sector, first responders, educators, the business community, the faith community and many others. Our agency plays an important role convening organizations, people and resources to support families.

The 2020 Coronavirus Needs Assessment revealed that of those of low income: 13.4% say they are "not at all aware of any resources to help my household." 37.63% say they are "aware of some resources for some needs my household is facing." Only 23.20% say they have a high knowledge of area resources to help meet their household's needs.

The Burlington Community School District spring 2021 Community Survey asked respondents what stopped them from getting help in the past, 30% said they didn't know help existed. The Lee County Child Abuse

¹¹ 2-I-I Counts. Increase calculated from March 1, 2019-March 1, 2020 compared to March 1, 2020 to March 1, 2021 in Des Moines, Lee, Henry, and Louisa Counties. <https://ia.211counts.org/>

¹² Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/public-health-nutrition/article/food-insecurity-and-maternal-depression-in-rural-low-income-families-a-longitudinal-investigation/BAA0F87F0356FDD78A1BF3DDC2776D64>

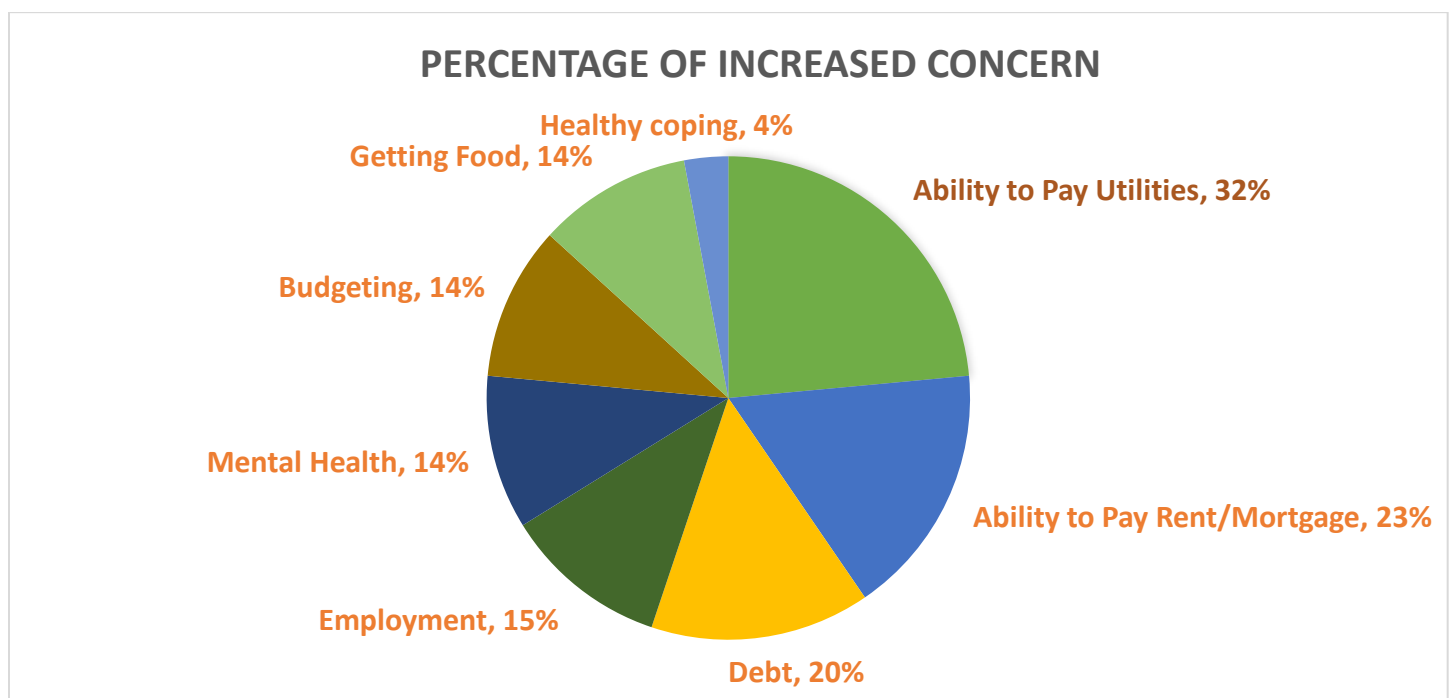
Prevention survey in spring 2021 asked respondents what barriers stopped them from getting help, 17.4% said they didn't know help existed. Some are unaware of resources available to them and their families as they are experiencing unemployment, reduced income, or have become low-income for the first time. In taking the survey, 11% of respondents included their contact information requesting more information on area resources and thereby received a follow up email.

Raising awareness of community resources continues to be one of our goals and a goal of many local helping agencies. Our agency collaborates for resource awareness by being at inter-agency groups, setting up at resource fairs, partnering with other agencies in events, distribution of printed materials, having a website, educating staff and clients of our and area programs and services, sharing and posting relevant information on social media.

Needs Related to Income

While every household has needs, they are different for those of low-income. Responses to our public 2021 Coronavirus Follow Up Needs Assessment garnered low income responses and responses from those above 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). While some needs are similar, healthy coping only had a 4% difference, there is a much greater percentage of respondents who noted their ability to pay utilities, ability to pay rent/mortgage, debt and employment were great household challenges. In addition, 31% more low-income respondents listed their household income was lower now than before COVID compared to those above 200% FPL.

The graph below lists significant differences between those of low income and those above 200% FPL self-identified greatest household challenges. They are listed by the percentage of increase between respondents of low income and those above 200% FPL. Example: Ability to pay utilities was listed by 32% more low-income respondents as a great need compared to those above 200% FPL.



Comparisons to 2020 Coronavirus Needs Assessment

Housing, utilities, debt, budgeting, and employment needs have increased over the past year when we compare our 2020 and 2021 COVID assessments. Educational concern for children and getting hygiene items has shown to be a reduced need. Mental health continues to be a great need and food needs remain roughly consistent.

Schooling

At the onset of the pandemic schools closed in our area. Educational concern for children was the third highest need listed in our 2020 Coronavirus Needs Assessment for those of low income. With all schools making adjustments and returning to full in person classes with other enhancements available by spring 2021, “educational concern for my children while they are not in school” dropped to the 16th priority (second to last) in our 2021 Coronavirus Follow Up Needs Assessment.

During the pandemic our agency continued family educational programing through virtual means, resumed Head Start educational classes in-person with safety measures, provided a school readiness summer program for four year olds, offered virtual class options for enrolled Head Start children, and is offering a virtual summer 2021 program for Head Start families. Our agency has promoted local internet options for low resourced families, spread the word on the Emergency Broadband Benefit program for low-income households to receive \$50 per month for internet, and continued to work with school partners to aid in children’s educational wellbeing.

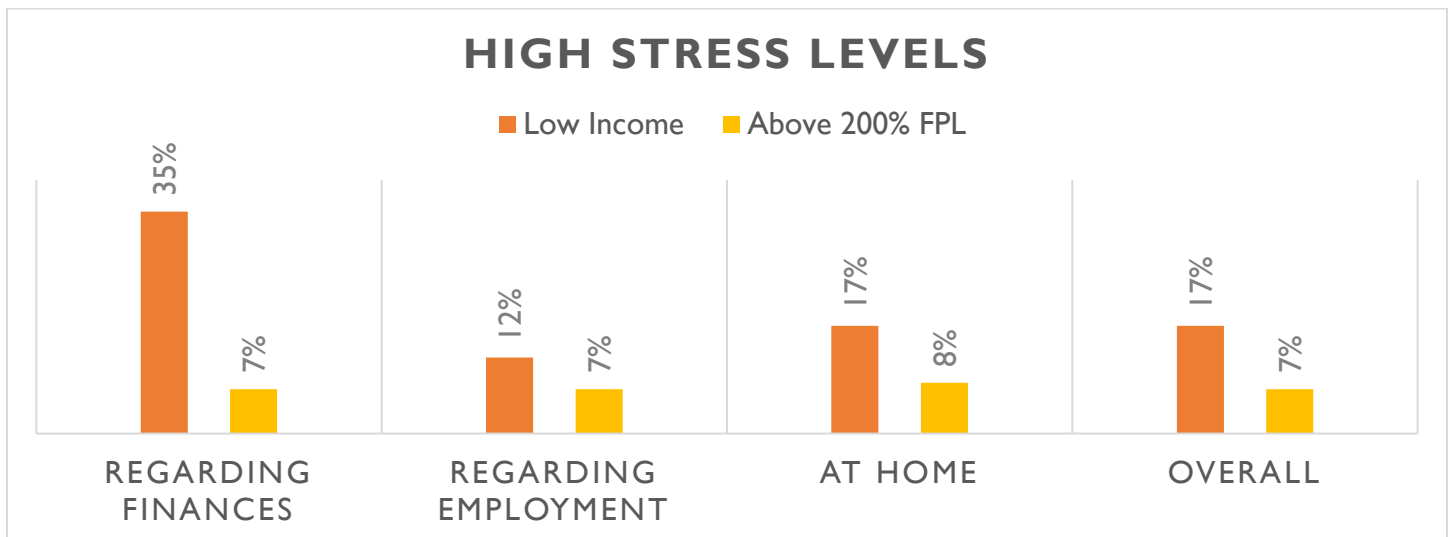
Hygiene

In our 2020 Coronavirus Needs Assessment 16% of low income respondents reported getting hygiene items was a great challenge. Only 4% of low-income respondents to our 2021 Coronavirus Follow Up Needs Assessment report getting hygiene items is a great challenge. The original survey was during a time period of toilet paper shortages which may have contributed to the higher need reported in spring 2020.

Our agency received additional funding to provide hygiene items to those seeking assistance through grants from Iowa Total Care in December 2020, and the North Lee Community Foundation in November 2020. Our hygiene pantries continue to operate for those in need.

Stress Levels

Those of low income have higher stress levels in every category when compared to those above 200% FPL. Their household challenges are greater than those above 200% FPL as noted earlier. Of households above 200% FPL 44% state “my household is comfortable right now with no great needs.” This is compared to only 20% of those of low income. These are all comparable to similar results in our 2020 Coronavirus Needs Assessment.



Stress levels have been connected to poverty in a variety of ways. When basic needs such as housing and food are not met, it is difficult for people to work on other goals. Their available energies are spent on day to day activities and needs rather than on future planning and goals. Higher stress levels for those in poverty also relates to mental health as noted earlier in this report.

COVID-19 Vaccines

The COVID-19 vaccine is available and free for anyone in our communities. It has been promoted and is available in several of our local areas. However, there is a difference between those of low income and higher incomes in the number of people who are getting vaccinated. Those of low income are more likely to have no plans to get vaccinated though they are often at higher risk. “Many factors, such as poverty and healthcare access, are intertwined and have a significant influence on the people’s health and quality-of-life. Racial and ethnic minority populations are disproportionately represented among essential workers and industries, which might be contributing to COVID-19 racial and ethnic health disparities.”¹³ In this 2021 Coronavirus Follow Up Needs Assessment survey 88% of higher income respondents stated they were vaccinated or were planning to be soon; in contrast only 70% of those of low income reported the same. Twelve percent of those above 200% FPL indicated they had no plan to be vaccinated, while 30% of those of low income said the same. This is a significant difference of 18%. This is comparative to state and national studies regarding differences in other vaccine statuses for children in poverty when compared with their higher income peers¹⁴.

There may be several contributing factors to the disparity in vaccination status and plans. Poverty often indicates fewer services, more chronic health conditions and higher risks of poor health outcomes¹⁵. Some factors may include different health vulnerabilities, transportation, language barriers, distrust of the government

¹³ CDC, Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>

¹⁴ NPR. May 20, 2019. The Other Reasons Kids Aren't Getting Vaccinations: Poverty And Health Care Access. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/05/20/724468630/the-other-reasons-kids-arent-getting-vaccinations-poverty-and-health-care-access>

¹⁵ The Des Moines Register. May 9, 2021. These Polk County ZIP codes have lower vaccination rates than their neighbors. What is being done to raise the rates? <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/health/2021/05/10/iowa-covid-vaccine-rates-lower-zip-codes-where-poorer-people-live/4940772001/>

or large corporations, less time and energy to think about planning, difficulty in making the time or appointments to get vaccinated, lower access to healthcare, and others.

We are not a healthcare agency, however our contact with those of low-income make us a partner in getting accurate information to those of low income and removing barriers so they can make an educated decision for their personal health.

Conclusions

Some area programs and funding may scale down as the pandemic subsides: things such as additional food assistance dollars through SNAP, Farmers to Families food program, and extra unemployment benefits. COVID Iowa Recovery mental health is currently scheduled to end in June 2021, Iowa Finance Authority rent and utility assistance through September 2022, and CSBG program eligibility is scheduled at this time to reduce from 200% FPL to 125% FPL on October 1, 2021. The ending of some programs and the reduction in benefits or eligibility for others we anticipate will produce greater need for our programs and services among those of low-income.

Those with low incomes continue to have great challenges to their households. Their challenges, as evidenced in the 2020 and 2021 surveys, reveal to be at a much higher level than their counterparts who have incomes above 200% FPL.

Top needs overall remain consistent and prevalent in southeast Iowa. Our agency continues to monitor needs, evaluate, and operate services and programs to produce positive outcomes as we aim to alleviate the conditions and causes of poverty through partnerships and quality services.

We recommend funding, programs, and services continue to be geared towards the top needs listed in this survey for those of low income:

- Coping with high stress levels in a healthy way/mental health/helping others cope
- Housing/Utilities
- Debt/Budgeting
- Employment
- Getting food